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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003189

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: DISPLACED FAMILIES PLAN RETURN TO SAN JOSE DE
APARTADO

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Over 1,300 displaced families plan to return to San Jose de Apartado in light of improved security. Local authorities and community leaders told Poloff the families have growing faith in the GOC's ability to provide security and basic government services. Remaining challenges include reintegrating over 3,000 former paramilitaries into the communities, and building residents' confidence in the security forces and judicial system. Despite improvements, residents remain reluctant to be identified with the military due to resentment over harassment by soldiers and fear of FARC retaliation. End summary.

¶2. (U) Uraba, which contains San Jose de Apartado, serves as an strategic corridor for narcotrafficking, weapons, smuggling, and human trafficking. It is a nexus of former paramilitaries, FARC, narcotraffickers, and new criminal groups. It is also an important export hub for legitimate crops, including bananas and African palm.

SECURITY SITUATION CONTINUES TO IMPROVE

¶3. (U) On April 30, Poloff met in San Jose de Apartado with leaders of some 1,300 displaced families, as well as representatives of Accion Social, the Defensor del Pueblo, the Church, and MAPP/OEA, during a public, day-long meeting focused on the families' return to the region. Community leaders said security had improved substantially, since the paramilitary demobilization. They also recognized they would not would not have been able to openly discuss their security and victims' claims in the past for fear of retaliation by former paramilitary groups. Accion Social representatives and the Defensor spoke to community leaders about their needs and their priorities for reintegration. Community leaders recognized the GOC's provision of basic services, and urged the GOC to ensure its presence in the area was permanent. MAPP/OEA representative Eleuterio Cahuec del Valle told Poloff business could now be conducted in markets and people could travel more freely.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

14. (U) Accion Social officials said locals were still developing trust in the GOC, which explained Accion Social's "hearts and minds" campaign to address basic needs. The leaders of the various San Jose displaced communities said they needed more extensive provision of basic services, especially health care and education. The Defensor also outlined a series of programs to improve local economic development, nutrition, health care, and educational opportunities, stressing the need for community involvement in these programs. Catholic Church representatives said increasing recreational opportunities would also be important. All agreed playgrounds, recreation centers, sports teams and art would help teach children cooperation and leadership skills, providing alternatives to violence.

15. (U) MAPP/OEA representative Cahuec del Valle stressed the GOC had at most a year to figure out how to adequately reintegrate former paramilitaries into the community. The Bloque de Bananeros demobilized in November 2004 and began to receive GOC reintegration assistance. In late 2006, the former members of the Bloque finished their 2 years of designated assistance and were now looking for what to do next. Cahuec del Valle staff said some former paramilitaries had joined narcotrafficking groups in the region due to a lack of employment. The region has strong economic potential in agricultural and as a port, but these have not yet translated into more jobs on the ground.

16. (C) Local Defensor del Pueblo (Human Rights Ombudsman) Ruben Dario Diaz told poloff he shared MAPP/OEA's concerns the GOC reintegration process was failing. It would be difficult to reintegrate more than 3000 former paramilitaries into a region that had suffered greatly from paramilitary

violence over the last decade. Moreover, he said the GOC would be hard-pressed to meet victims' expectations. The over 2600 victims who have filed declarations with GOC authorities in the Uraba region under the Justice and Peace Law process are concerned the National Prosecutor's Office will not follow through and prosecute those responsible.

DEFENSOR DEL PUEBLO'S VIEW

17. (C) Diaz told Poloff privately urban and rural residents of San Jose de Apartado appreciate GOC efforts to provide them access to social services/infrastructure and understand the increased state presence needs to be accompanied by GOC security forces. Even members of the Holandita Peace Community--which continues to refuse direct contact with the GOC--use the health clinic in the nearby urban center. Still, Diaz said local residents, especially in rural areas, do not want to be identified with the military because of resentment over harassment by troops in the field and fear of FARC retaliation. Many rural residents also have relatives in the FARC.

18. (C) He said the 17th Brigade's current leadership was significantly better than in the past in insisting that troops respect local civilians, but said poorly educated recruits often treat rural residents badly (harassment of women and peasants at checkpoints, petty theft, use of civilian homes for cooking and protections, etc.). The attitude of individual unit commanders is key to minimize such problems. Still, Diaz stressed Apartado is calmer than it has been for years. Little by little, the public is gaining confidence in the GOC presence.

19. (C) Diaz said the ICRC has communicated with the FARC about local residents' planned return to areas around San Jose de Apartado, and the FARC has said it will not oppose them. Diaz said he was held for two hours by the FARC last November near Los Mulatos. The FARC questioned him extensively about GOC social and economic development projects in the region, with a focus on their funding. The FARC claimed they would not destroy development projects, but would attack any projects funded by paramilitaries or aimed

at "the paramilitarization of San Jose de Apartado's economy."

Red de Cooperantes

¶10. (C) Both the MAPP/OEA and Ruiz voiced concerns over the 17th Brigade's incorporation of former paramilitaries into the its red de cooperantes (a formalized information network whose members are unpaid, and unarmed, but provide information to the military or police.) Cahuec del Valle said the Brigade has allowed a private group, Servicios Especiales, to take over the red de cooperantes. They said community leaders had expressed fear that Servicios was a front for former paramilitaries who have continued criminal activities. Diaz said other former paramilitaries, who have created a new criminal group known as Renacer, are members of an army-managed red near San Pedro de Uraba and Necocli. The Renacer members are not in uniform, but are armed.
Drucker